

brandED:
an educational journey of personal branding

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Personal branding is becoming a popular topic, especially for undergraduate students. By utilizing the techniques learned through class and immersive experiences about brand development, and drawing inspiration from corporate brand standard guides, I created a step-by-step process that young professionals can use to create their own personal brand. The process was found through the development of my own brand to be used as a case study. This thesis was completed in two parts. First was a website showcasing my personal brand (nicolemmaclean.com), and the second was a presentation teaching undergraduates the importance of personal branding and the steps they could follow to develop their own.

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Brand management is a subset field of marketing. Understanding and implementing brand development techniques can make the difference between a company's success and failure. Most companies create a brand standard guide showing the elements of their brand along with the correct uses. The Diverse Staffing Guide, created in 2014 by Caitlin Cambron, is an excellent example. These guides used by companies served as the inspiration for my creative project.

Personal branding is becoming a popular topic, especially for undergraduate students. Professors and professionals give presentations about the importance of personal brands for students focusing on teaching them how to set themselves apart in the job search process. However, these presentations rarely speak to the how of creating a personal brand. By utilizing the techniques I have learned through class and immersive experiences about brand development, I wanted to create a step-by-step process that young professionals could use to create their own personal brand. This thesis was completed in two parts. First was a website showcasing my personal brand (nicolemmaclean.com), and the second was a presentation teaching undergraduates the importance of personal branding and the steps they could follow to develop their own (presentation found in Appendix A).

To begin this process, I followed the traditional route of any other company brand – determine the main attributes of the product and create brand elements that represent these. In the case of a personal brand, I was the product, meaning I needed to determine the skills and strengths that set me apart to serve as my attributes. To do this, I took three personality tests to provide me with my standout strengths: StrengthsFinder, TypeFocus, and MyersBriggs. Based on these results, I compiled a list of words that would create my brand attributes.

By attempting to determine these assets, I quickly realized my initial thought of creating a personal brand based on company brand development would not be successful. For a company product, their brand can be consistent because it is an inanimate object or closely controlled service. Whatever connotations and features the product provides, its consumers will always be the same. However, when creating the attributes for a personal brand, the product is a person that can adapt and fluctuate depending on their mood or whom they are interacting with. Also, just using words from a personality test left the brand feeling disingenuous and lacking the humanness of my personality. The tests provided a great foundation to build from, but nobody knows me better than me. Unlike traditional brand development best practices, I learned that some decisions would be made strictly because I thought it represented me, which is reason enough to use it.

By using traditional brand development techniques as a guide instead of a strict path to follow, I was able to create my own personal brand to serve as a case study for other undergraduate students. Below outlines the final step-by-step process I developed for young professionals to adapt based on their major and industry.

1.) Find a mentor

The first step in creating a personal brand is to find a mentor. As a young professional, having someone for accountability and honest feedback is critical. The mentor should be someone who knows the mentee well and can ensure that decisions made truly show the essence of that person's personality.

2.) Personal Research

Personal research and self-reflection is the most important step in the development of a personal brand. This was the most critical step for me because it showed me that following a traditional method of brand development would not work for a personal brand. For this step, personality tests provide an excellent foundation. StrengthsFinder, run through Gallup, determines a person's top five strengths with detailed analysis of their effects on one's personality. As well as reviewing one's strengths, understanding weaknesses and how they affect the brand decreases the chance of fakeness. Owning one's weaknesses also provides a greater depth, because the brand showcases what the person is good at, as well as what can be improved. After that, self-reflection of one's communication and leadership style defines how that person will interact with others. Finally, bringing in special personality quirks, such as a favorite animal or past time, adds sincerity and a personal touch.

3.) Industry Research

For young professionals to determine others' perceptions, it is more beneficial to conduct industry research, as opposed to interviewing friends and family. Undergraduate students are in a transition period, balancing between being a student and entering the real world as a professional. When creating a personal brand, choosing attributes that align with one's future industry will be more beneficial than incorporating elements from the past. Due to this, talking to a handful of professionals in the industry provides context to what will make the student successful in their future jobs. Reading articles and blogs from thought-leaders in the industry can also provide this information.

4.) Find Overlap

Step four brings together the research from the last two steps to determine the ultimate brand attributes. Visually, think of this step as a Venn diagram; use the descriptions from the personal

research and find the overlapping elements from the industry research. Whatever the two have in common will provide the strongest attributes for creating a professional brand. Just because something overlaps, does not mean it needs to be included. This is where instinct becomes important. The final attributes needs to feel genuine and represent the most consistent strengths and personality traits. Including the mentor in this step can be very helpful to ensure that the decisions are being honest.

It is crucial to complete the personal research before conducting industry research. If the steps were switched, it would cause bias while completing the personal research. Instead of looking at one's self objectively, people may start looking for characteristics they know would make them successful in the industry instead of being truthful about who they really are.

5.) Social Media and Search Engine Optimization

Personal brands are best showcased through one's online presence, whether positively or negatively. When developing a personal brand, taking control of that online presence can allow for someone to control what others see. This is something that comes from traditional branding. All online platforms should have a consistent name, URL, photo, and description. In the case of a personal brand, this means someone's name, a professional picture, and consistent descriptions showcasing the brand attributes.

The personal brand name should be chosen based on the idea of Search Engine Optimization (SEO). SEO is increasing the visibility of a webpage on a search engine results page, such as Google or Bing. Basically when someone says they are going to "Google you," understanding SEO can enable "your" websites to show up in the first few results. Choosing a name to increase the chances of the correct profiles being displayed means having a distinct name that is the same for all profiles. If someone is named John Smith, Googling that name will return with many

different results, most of which will not be the correct John Smith. However, Googling John R. Smith, will narrow the search results. Therefore John R. Smith should be the branded name used on all social media profiles, website, resume, and business cards. This increases the visibility of John R's online presence.

Online presence is not just about the name, it also includes content being shared. By using the SEO name, more people will be able to see John's profiles, meaning they will also be seeing what he is posting. John needs to be aware of the image he is creating for himself and should remove anything inappropriate and start posting more relevant, professional content. This can be as simple as sharing articles, or starting a blog where he can add his own commentary to topics in his industry, community, or the world.

6.) Application

The final step is to determine how the brand will be applied for that person. The application will look different for each person, major, and industry. However, through this project I have determined a few areas that can be universally applied and considered regardless of industry or major. A person needs to create a strong personal statement. Personal statements can vary in length anywhere from a page to 140 characters and can be used on websites, social media descriptions, cover letters, and resumes. Creating a well written about statement that incorporates the brand attributes will make it very easy to adapt it based on different needs and save time. Besides controlling the online presence, people need to be aware of what their wardrobe nonverbally communicates. A person's wardrobe serves the same purpose as a product's packaging. It communicates the expectation of what someone will receive by using the product or quality of interaction with that individual. Finally, the simplest, yet most important way to apply a personal brand is through personal interactions with people. In the second step, the

communication style should have been determined. Applying it here, as well as incorporating the personality characteristics is the best way for someone to experience the brand first hand.

As a marketing major and digital publishing minor, I chose to apply my brand through the creation of a website showcasing a brand standard guide – nicolemmaclean.com. I created typical corporate brand elements such as logo, tagline, color, and font for my personal brand and displayed them in a very similar format to corporate standard guides. This was a personal choice that may not be applicable for all undergraduates creating their brands. By designing a logo and choosing colors and fonts that represent me, I was able to combine both my minor and major. These four elements are showcased below with reasoning behind my decisions.

LOGO:



The logo is a visual representation of my search engine optimized name - Nicole M. MacLean. I wanted something that did not look like a monogram, and had a modern feel to it. The logo can be used in all four brand colors and will be used on the website, resume, stationary, business cards, and any other appropriate needs.

TAGLINE: strategically minded, creatively inclined

The tagline describes the lens I use to see the world. It is the epitome of how I react to and solve problems in life. Originally, I did not intend to use a tagline. I thought this would be an aspect of product brand development that would not transfer well to a personal brand; however,

this really spoke to me and felt very genuine to who I am. Strategic and creative were two words that stood out from both the personal and industry research, and before this project, I thought these were two of my strengths. Marketers are both right and left brained. Through the last four years, I have learned that the most successful marketers can understand the data analytics as well as the creative campaigns. This tagline not only sums up my strengths, but also relates well to the fact that I am a marketer and have learned how to apply both analytics and creativity to my field.

FONTS:

Aa | AA

TONE
 fresh, dynamic,
 contemporary calligraphy

AVAILABLE AT
www.fontsquirrel.com

Alegreya

Nicole M. MacLean
 AaBbCcDdEeFfGg1234567890

Nicole M. MacLean
 AaBbCcDdEeFfGg1234567890

Nicole M. MacLean
 AaBbCcDdEeFfGg1234567890

Aa | AA

TONE
 modern, sleek,
 playful, versatile

AVAILABLE AT
www.fontsquirrel.com

Alegreya Sans

strategically minded
 AaBbCcDdEeFfGg1234567890

strategically minded
 AaBbCcDdEeFfGg1234567890

strategically minded
 AaBbCcDdEeFfGg1234567890

strategically minded
 AaBbCcDdEeFfGg1234567890

I was first interested in this font, because it was designed in both serif and sans serif font categories. After further reading of the description, I realized that it accurately captured my personality. Alegreya was designed to add a modern feel to the calligraphic letter. There are subtle details to the font design that make it special, but still very professional. “Not only does Alegreya provide great performance, but also achieves a strong and harmonious text by means of elements designed in an atmosphere of diversity” (*Free Font Alegreya*, 2012). Alegreya Sans is a bit more playful, but still incorporates some of the traditional elements of its sister font. The sans serif version can be used for as a less serious and less academic use. Its most notable attributes include versatility, allowing the brand to adapt to various situations.

COLORS:

Primary



Orange

CMYK 0 | 50 | 87 | 0

RGB 246 | 147 | 57

WEB #F69339

Merging the passion of red and the joy of yellow, orange showcases the ability to combine the best attributes of contrasting concepts. Orange symbolizes enthusiasm, creativity, optimism, success, and determination.

Accents



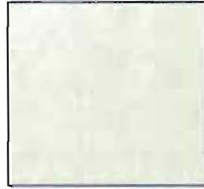
Navy Blue

CMYK 100 | 91 | 36 | 29

RGB 26 | 43 | 90

WEB #1A2B5A

Evoking the associations from both blue and black, navy blue creates a sense of sophisticated elegance as well as conveying confidence and authority. Navy blue, like ivory and grey, is a neutral color adding stability and unity to the brand.



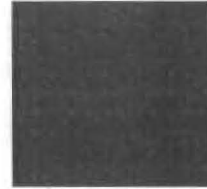
Ivory

CMYK 4 | 0 | 15 | 0

RGB 244 | 257 | 221

WEB #F4F7DD

Adding a soft, clean luster to the brand, ivory creates a relaxed tone of understated elegance. As another neutral color, ivory adds a warmer feeling than gray. Using ivory is a great way to brighten the use of the darker colors.



Gray

CMYK 62 | 54 | 49 | 22

RGB 97 | 97 | 101

WEB #616165

The color of compromise, gray further represents the combination of opposites in my personality. Gray perpetuates stability and provides calmness in chaos, complementing the liveliness of orange.

My brand color palette is designated between the primary color and the three accent colors. Orange is my primary color. Not only do I relate to the color associations for orange, but also my personality seems to embody this color. Particularly the fact that orange “combines the passion from red with the joy of yellow” (Bear, 2015). I am a very passionate person, which is where the determination comes in, but red can be a bit of an extreme. The yellow creates a nice balance and also brings in optimism. Orange also evokes creativity, which goes along with my tagline.

The three accent colors - navy blue, ivory, and gray - also have connotations that match my personality; however, they are neutral colors that balance well with the intensity of orange. Navy blue and ivory add more elegance and sophistication to the brand. Navy blue combines

both blue and black and evokes confidence adding stability to the brand. Ivory is more subdued than the blue creating a more relaxed feeling; however, it is warmer than the neutral gray. Gray is the color of compromise, which also pairs well with my juxtaposing tagline (Color Wheel, 2015). Gray also provides stability, but is not quite as bold as the navy blue.

All together, these colors complement each other well. All four can be used for the logo and can be paired based on design need. These colors also show up within my wardrobe. I have chosen to show my brand colors through accent pieces such as jewelry, scarves, and purses. Since navy blue, ivory, and gray are neutral colors, these can be incorporated through classic pieces such as pants and under jacket pieces.

WEBSITE:

Outside of these four distinct brand elements, my website is a hub to showcase my about statement, resume, photography, and blog. This website is a culmination of everything I have learned from college and will help me differentiate myself through my unique experiences as I enter the real world.

The 'about statement' was crafted using some of the brand attributes determined in step four. As apart of my digital publishing minor, I have learned the art of photography. This page of the site showcases some of my best work utilizing techniques learned in class. Blogging is an opportunity to showcase my thoughts on industry trends, as well as share some important events that happen in my life. Understanding blogging best practices will help me in my career when working with clients trying to maintain their company's blog. Finally, the website also provides access to all of my social media profiles, as well as a contact form for visitors to email me. This shows the implementation of step five into my brand and how easy it is for people to connect with me.

Through creating my personal brand, I have been able to create a process that other undergraduate students can utilize to develop their own brand. Following the six steps - find a mentor, personal research, industry research, find overlap, social media and SEO, and application – anybody regardless of major or industry can begin creating their brand. A strong understanding of one's brand can help them ensure positive perceptions from others as well as differentiate themselves in a competitive job market.

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Ann Handley - February 2, 2015

- What does personal brand mean to you?
 - Personal brand is what you stand for: What value do you bring to the world? How do you help others? It's who you are.
- What is your personal brand?
 - Funny. I don't think about this often, but I suppose my personal brand is broadly what my Twitter handle says -- waging a war on mediocrity in marketing. More specifically, I do that by making complex marketing issues simple and accessible, with a dose of humor.
 - How do you show it?
 - Through the content I publish on AnnHandley.com, as well as all my writing (books, MarketingProfs.com, Entrepreneur mag) and social media channels, too (Instagram, Facebook, LI, etc.)
- How much should a personal brand permeate your life?
 - I don't think it's separate from your life -- it IS your life. It's who you are. It's your code, in a sense.
- How much should personal beliefs influence a professional personal brand?
 - Well, my belief system permeates everything I do.
- What are some standout words for the marketing industry. People try to differentiate themselves in a Cover Letter/Resume, so what are characteristics or specific words that can set an individual apart?
 - Do you have a copy of *Everybody Writes*? (let me know if you don't -- I'll send you one) I talk about this in the LinkedIn chapter. But generally, the important thing is not to list your accomplishments -- but talk about why they matter to others. So, frame your accomplishments in terms of what that meant -- not just what it was. For example: You were the email marketing manager. (Boring.) Better is: You grew the email list by 500% over 2 years, resulting in \$10 million in new business.
- What can make someone successful at their job in the marketing industry?
 - Understanding that the best marketing doesn't feel like marketing (to quote Tom Fishburne). Instead, it feels like something people want.